United Nations A/55/60-E/2000/17

General Assembly
Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
19 April 2000

Original: English

General Assembly
Fifty-fifth session
Item 97 of the preliminary list*
Environment and sustainable development

Economic and Social Council
Substantive session of 2000
5 July-1 August 2000
Item 13 of the provisional agenda**
Economic and environmental questions

Letter dated 17 April 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Tajikistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to refer to the statement of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Emomali Rakhmonov, at the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, in which he made a proposal to proclaim the year 2003 as the International Year of Fresh Water.

The Republic of Tajikistan proceeds from the fact that the problem of fresh water is one of the most serious challenges to the achievement of sustainable development in the new millennium.

I should like to express my appreciation to you for bringing the attention of the world community to this important issue in your report entitled "We the peoples: the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century".

I have also the honour to inform you that to develop the initiative of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan we have sent the United Nations Member States detailed proposals in this regard.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 97 of the preliminary list, and of the Economic and Social Council, under item 13 of the provisional agenda.

(*Signed*) Rashid **Alimov**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* A/55/50.
** E/2000/100.

00-40050 (E) 250400

Annex to the letter dated 17 April 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Tajikistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: English and Russian]

Proposal of Tajikistan to proclaim 2003 as the International Year of Fresh Water

1. Fresh-water resources and their sustainable management are essential for satisfying long-term basic human needs, health and food production, energy, and maintenance of regional and global ecosystems, as well as for sustainable development in general.

2. In spite of a number of strategic documents adopted by the international community in the area of fresh water over the past decades, including the Mar del Plata Action Plan, chapter 18 of Agenda 21, as well as decisions of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, the current situation with fresh water continues to be a cause of serious alarm at all levels: local; national, regional and global.

3. Many specialists agree that the sustainability of fresh-water resources, both in terms of their supply and quality, would be among the most pressing challenges of sustainable development in the new millennium. The United Nations has estimated that, if current trends continue, by the year 2025 about two thirds of the world's population will lack adequate access to fresh water.

4. The recent report of the Secretary-General entitled "We the peoples: the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century" attaches high priority to the need for action by the international community to address current fresh-water problems in order to sustain our future. Fresh water continues to be a matter of great concern as expressed by many non-governmental organizations and international conferences, including the recent World Water Forum's Ministerial Conference.

5. It is a well-known fact that because of water pollution half of the world's population lives in unsanitary conditions; more than 5 million people die every year and more than 3 billion become ill.

6. Tajikistan believes that the current fresh water problems are not a result of a lack of international agreements, decisions and recommendations in this area. However, much more effective and concerted measures, together with a much stronger political will are required at all levels to implement those decisions and action programmes with a view to reversing trends which threaten to undermine the well-being and sustainable development of billions of people worldwide.

7. To achieve more measurable progress it is essential to promote and secure the following:

- Mobilizing stronger political commitment to action aimed at the implementation of already agreed decisions;
- Undertaking more aggressive and more far-reaching public awareness campaigns, as well as education regarding the values of fresh water;

- Promoting exchanges of experiences in successful policies and practices at the local, national, regional and international levels;

- Strengthening partnerships between the public and private sectors, as well as between communities, local authorities and Governments;

- Enhancing international cooperation, with an emphasis on strengthening the role to be played by international organizations, particularly the family of United Nations institutions.

8. Experience gained over the past years has shown that various international years proclaimed by the international community can foster action and awareness, thus greatly facilitating and expediting progress towards the achievement of goals and objectives in given areas.

9. In the light of the considerations listed above, Emomali Rakhmonov, President of the Republic of Tajikistan, speaking at the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, suggested that the year 2003 be proclaimed by the General Assembly as the International Year of Fresh Water.

10. Specific reasons for having the International Year of Fresh Water in 2003 are as follows:

- 2003 will be the first year after the United Nations undertakes the 10-year comprehensive review of progress achieved since the historic 1992 Rio Earth Summit. It is most likely that the issue of fresh water will feature prominently among priority areas during the 2002 review and it is expected to be the focus of various preparatory activities and international initiatives leading to 2002. The 2002 review could thus generate momentum towards the proposed International Year of Fresh Water and may result in a number of concrete proposals for the programme of such a Year.

- The first World Water Development Report is expected to be published in 2002.

- Furthermore, 2002 has already been proclaimed by the United Nations as the International Year of Mountains. Bearing in mind the role of the mountains as the "water towers" of the world, the outcomes of the Year of Mountains could be constructively integrated into the activities of the Year of Fresh Water.

11. As for specific elements that could constitute the programme of the Year of Fresh Water, the following ideas may be considered:

- Making special arrangements for celebrating World Water Day in 2003 at United Nations Headquarters, the headquarters of the regional commissions, and at United Nations national offices and information centres;

- Inviting the governing bodies of organizations and agencies of the United Nations system to give special consideration in 2003 to the issue of fresh water in relation to the areas of their specific expertise (WHO — health and sanitation; FAO — agriculture; WMO and UNESCO — hydrological science; UNEP — environmental protection; etc);

- Inviting the regional commissions to place the issue of fresh water on the agendas of their annual meetings in 2003;

- Inviting countries and international and regional organizations to organize global and regional meetings of experts and practitioners to exchange experiences and good practice in integrated fresh-water management and finding sustainable fresh-water management solutions, including within specific sectors (such as industry, energy, agriculture; household use, etc); and in fostering relevant public-private partnerships;

- Inviting Governments, local authorities and non-governmental organizations to organize exhibitions and public information campaigns in schools, community centres and other relevant facilities with a view to raising public awareness and knowledge regarding the value of fresh water and the threats associated with current unsustainable patterns of water use;

- Inviting mayors of cities and local authorities to undertake campaigns aimed at finding practical solutions to local water-related problems. The results achieved in the course of 2003 could be reported, through their associations, to relevant United Nations bodies, such as the Commission on Sustainable Development and the regional commissions;

- Inviting international institutions, the donor community, and non-governmental organizations to undertake concrete projects aimed at improving safe and reliable access to water in remote and rural areas;

- Inviting the private sector to undertake concrete initiatives in the area of responsible water use and management;

- The results of various activities to take place as part of the programme of the International Year of Fresh Water could subsequently be reported to the General Assembly;

- Furthermore, the results of analysis of the most promising policies and practices could be included in publications and education material, as well as in training manuals that could be used in technical cooperation and capacity-building activities carried out by international organizations and bilateral donors.

12. The Republic of Tajikistan welcomes an open and constructive discussion of the suggestions set out above, as well as of any other ideas regarding the proposed International Year of Fresh Water, with all delegations and other interested parties.

13. We also count on interest in and support of this initiative on the part of the Administrative Committee on Coordination Subcommittee on Water Resources, and other international agencies and non-governmental and major groups.

14. We look forward to a constructive discussion on this proposal during the forthcoming fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly and the adoption of a relevant resolution on the proclamation of 2003 as the International Year of Fresh Water.